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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities
Forty-ninth session
Agenda item 11

REVIEW OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN FIELDS WITH WHICH
THE SUB-COMMISSION HAS BEEN OR MAY BE CONCERNED

Written statement submitted by the African Bureau of Educational Sciences, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[20 August 1997]

1. The African Bureau of Educational Sciences wishes to advise you of our concerns regarding the current rise of religious and ethnic discrimination occurring in countries worldwide. For example, on 6 June 1997, the Church of Scientology, located in Germany, was placed under surveillance by the German Government for at least one year. The German Government views the Church of Scientology as a commercial venture instead of a religious organization. There has been no proof of illegality or an explanation to date by government authorities for this action. This method of intimidation and censorship constitutes a serious potential for violation of over 30,000 Scientologists' right to freedom of religion, right to freedom of speech and right to privacy.

GE.97-13996 (E)

2. From 20 to 22 July 1997, Lift Every Voice, Inc., in conjunction with a coalition of human rights organizations and American churches, conducted a fact-finding hearing to assess the recent trend of surveillance on Scientologists and other religious groups. We are concerned about the chilling effect this action by the German Government has had on religious groups, such as Charismatic Christians, small philosophical groups, Muslims and racial groups. We respect the request by several religious groups to not mention the names of their members or their places of worship in order to diminish the possibility of retaliation by the German Government. Therefore, we will focus specifically on religious discrimination against the Church of Scientology, the religious group most frequently targeted by the German Government.

3. The surveillance against Scientologists violates the human rights of their members throughout the world. United States Scientologists, musical legend Isaac Hayes and jazz great Chick Corea, who travel and conduct business in Germany, reported violations of their human rights in Germany. Many of Isaac Hayes' artistic appearances in Germany have been cancelled or unconfirmed after he announced that he is a Scientologist. Chick Corea has experienced repeated artistic discrimination since 1993. Last year, after a sell-out concert at the Burghausen jazz festival, he was told that he was banned from all future performances at the festival solely based on his religious affiliation. Thus, these Scientologists' right to a livelihood is being violated in conjunction with their right to freedom of religion.

4. Religion is one of the most fundamental human rights that people value and cherish. Scientologists and other religious groups will lose their right to freedom of religion, and face an even more dangerously repressive future in Germany, if measures are not taken to address these actions of religious and ethnic discrimination.

5. Religious discrimination continues to persist in the United States. Evidence of this can be found in the remains of the rubble of places of worship in minority communities. Unfortunately, white extremist groups are still attempting to build a consensus of racial and religious hate in that country. The National Church Arson Task Force reported that 267 of the places of worship attacked were white and 162 were African-American, including 11 synagogues, 4 mosques and numerous churches. Almost 4 out of 10 (37.8 per cent) of those attacked were at predominantly African-American churches in the southern part of the United States. Many NGOs have stated that these figures are less than the actual number of places of worship burned to the ground. A 1997 report by the Center for Democratic Renewal stated that several white extremist groups are working collaboratively to destroy the spirit and soul of religious and racial groups. The acts of white extremist groups and their attempt to promote religious and racial unrest must not be tolerated by the international community.

6. We want to inform you of many other acts of religious discrimination prevalent against Muslims in the United States. Since the bombing of the World Trade Center, there has been a rise in anti-Islamic attitudes and desecration of mosques, especially in New York City. In February 1997, over 2,000 Muslims at the Staten Island Mosque were evacuated from their place of worship after two bomb threats. The Muslims were celebrating the end of

Ramadan. Harriet Abubakar, Attorney-General for The Lost-Found Nation of Islam, under the leadership and guidance of the Honorable Salis Muhammad, reported that their members have been denied the right to practise their religion in various federal and state prisons, especially in the State of Texas and the State of Georgia.

7. Another illustration of religious discrimination is the recent discriminatory practice of several Christian foster care homes against Muslim children. The Islamic Family Services, a foster care programme for Muslim children, located in New York City, recently was closed. As a result, the children were placed in Christian foster care homes by the local social services department. The Muslim children were forced by Christians to change their Muslim names and attend Christian churches.

8. We salute the work of Mr. Amor and concur with his belief that it is important to develop an international policy on religious tolerance in conjunction with the establishment of a cultural tolerance through teaching, mass media, and religious instruction. We recommend that the Sub-Commission draft a resolution creating a working group on religious intolerance. We also recommend that this working group serve as a forum for religious organizations to provide pertinent information regarding acts of religious discrimination by Governments and extremist groups.

9. It is our hope that such a working group would assist in curtailing the current chilling effect on religious groups of a fear of retaliation by offending Governments.